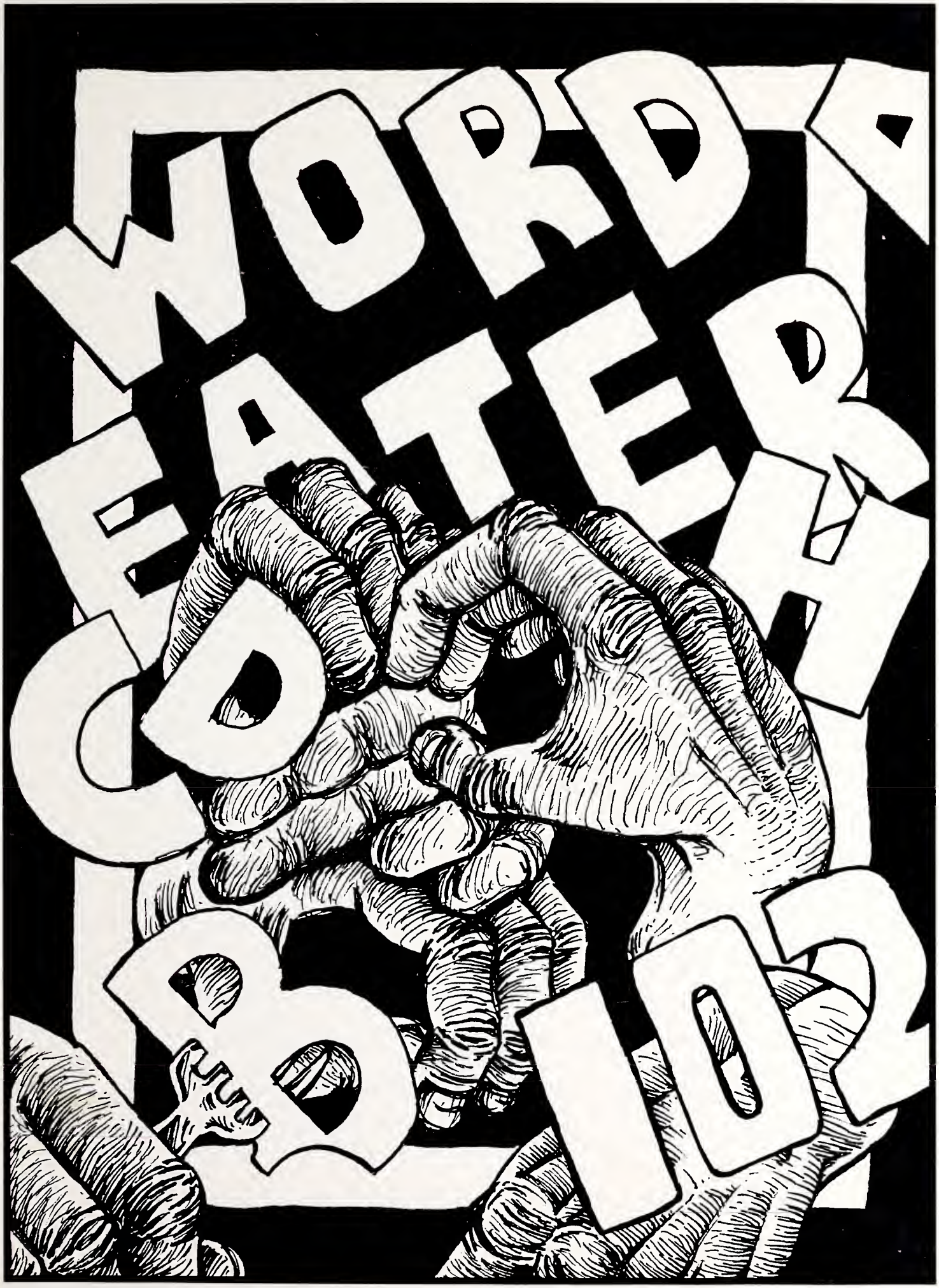
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Sonnet
Lyubov E. Mir

I have it running through my head; a song
In perfect harmony and perfect time.
But somehow it is coming out all wrong
And I can't seem to get the lines
    to sound right.

What happens 'tween be visions in my head
And paper's blank reality in white?
When in my head I sing of hopes and fears
But on the page the sound is never
    what I want.

A thousand melodies are swirling 'round
Within my head, their truths and
    meanings real.
But since I can't make sense
    from their wild sound
I can't explain emotions that I possess.

So long as men can breathe,
    and eyes can see
So long lives this,
    and this gives life to no one.

Untitled
Lyubov E. Mir

To write a poem as the ancients wrote,
To strictly keep your rhythm in their time,
Considering what space you should devote
To each idea and its ending rhyme,
To choose your words precisely,
    as you ought,
To give a meaning to each one you say,
To concentrate on balancing your thought
With wild ideas, free to fly away,
It makes you realize their genius will
Not be repeated in another style
They wrote with such extraordinary skill
Confining all their thoughts to fourteen lines.
And freely said the world in limited space
By using poet's art, like dancer's grace.

My Chosen Land
Lyubov E. Mir

My heart lives in a forest of its own.
Where, deep within, the sun has never shone.
A tree that falls in here will make no sound
I know because I've heard them all around.
There is a gentle wind that stirs the leaves
And whispers dreams of lovers' words to me.
But since I cannot see outside my glade
The voices only serve to make me 'fraid.
Because the light that gently kisses trees
Inside a wood, does not the same for me.
And so I choose to live inside the shade
Quite far from where a sunbeam
    e'er has strayed.
Here waiting for someone to take my hand
And lead me home from this,
    my chosen land.

Pink Bunny
Pam Giorgis

Don Quixote . . .
    fighting battles that cannot be WON
Justice. Whose?
Knowing with the wisdom
    of many past conflicts
Some won . . . more lost
Never-ending caused for
WHAT IS "RIGHT"
Against the world of
"So What?"
The ever ready bunny
Up against the wall.

Jenna
Pam Giorgis

She dominates each room she enters.
Captivates those in her realm.
Her deep green eyes hypnotize
While her supple, pink lips pout and flirt
She plays with our emotions.
She is queen of all that she surveys.
The world opens up in her presence.
We are but her subjects.
She is 3.
She is JENNA!

Assimilation
Anonymous

You look into a crowded room
But see no one
No friend, no foe, nor even a stranger
To return your glance with reluctant "Hello"
There is only the mass
"The A group"
A collective soul
That refuses to accept your advances
You stare into the heart of the mass
Try to find a hole
One into which you could squeeze
    your meek self
And forget the previous longing
Even if it means leaving parts of your body
Outside.
This soul is a force you can't penetrate
No matter how sharp the sword
They will pull you and push you
    until you bleed
And then cast you aside, laughing.

Repetitions and a Reverie
Anonymous

she's about the withering rhythm
    of a garbage can doorlet

about the raised and recessed texture
    of her sweater - traced by her

finger a nubbin caught
between the nail loosed and the finger
caught again

she is outside her window just her own bare
leg though god-like the
leg towering behind the torn out bucket seats
blue in her front yard
facing the street
covered
in
fallen
autumn

Words of a Fool

Jimmy Albright

Cursed love!
The greatest of all evils.
Casually, you strut across the room,
spreading your charm with deadly power.
Blissfully ignorant and indifferent
to the pain you bring.
And when the music begins, you look at me,
and I fall prey to your touch.

Cursed love!
The master of all illusions.
You cast your invisible web upon me.
I am powerless to resist you.
But you smile so sweetly,
affection in your eyes,
and I submit to your embrace.
But the widow that you are bites me
as I come near,
and I choke and collapse in agony.

But my chagrin outweighs the suffering.
And I am left alive —
to do it again.

Peace

Melissa Andras

One day while I was
walking
I came upon a
strange man talking

He had attracted a small
congregation
and spoke of change
in our small nation

He said, and I do
quote his words
"Our world is falling,
have you heard?

The people fight and
kill each other.
This doesn't have to be
my brother.

The land is being
overtaken
for all the prisons that
we're makin'

Censorship is at its
height.
We're controlled by
our own fright.

But brothers, sisters,
countrymen
we need not
give into them.

There is a place that
we can go
and teach our children
what we know.

There is a place where
violence ceased
and all around you
there is peace.

There are no rules or
regulations
except to love each other
and change our nation.

The land is green
and filled with trees
you can pick some flowers
if you please.

And if you dream of
peace within
and a land that has
no sin

Then come and watch
the peaceful swallow."
Then he walks off
and we all follow.

The Island of Dreams

Melissa Andras

Long ago and far away
I looked out to the sea
And wondered if there was a place
that I would rather be.

The coral reefs and saltwater swell
cover me all day
The waters not this fresh at all
in the city by the bay

I wonder if the buildings
would be a pleasant change

and the boring city streets
how grey they are arranged

The sand then slid through my toes
and the waves hi-fived the shore
the grey blue sky over me
sends down a sunny storm

It makes the blossoms grow so big
when no one cuts them down
wild birds float slowly by
never wanting solid ground

I swim and sing, dance and play
bathe in the fresh spring
and sometimes I climb the hills
laughing all the way

And then I know this place
is really deep inside a dream
It isn't really far away
from life's monotony.

Jayme

Melissa Andras

Ever since I was a small child I remember feeling alone. It's not because I didn't play nice with the other children. I had just as many friends as any other child. I felt different than the other kids, like there was something special about who I was. As I grew I tired to ignore the lonely feelings I had. At one point I even broke out of the shyness that had encompassed me for most of my childhood.

No matter how many friends I had, I still felt like an empty bottle. I found boys easier to be around than girls for some reason, but I never found a person who made me fit and feel better although the search was never ending. After I got it together and finally met my boyfriend, the dreams started. I shouldn't say they just started; they were always there. Now they were so vivid; he finally had a face. I had dreams when I was a child about a boy who was always looking for me and trying to help me. What I remember most is that he was always reaching out his hand. That's why I associated my earlier dreams with the more recent ones, the ones with the face.

The first dream I had I didn't think anything of. I remember a face, a decaying face, looking at me in a room that looked like a bathroom. He just looked at me, and I was afraid of him, he looked so scary. I pleaded with him to make his face better, and finally he did. I was still scared until he told me not to be. He had a sweet voice, like a little boy. Soon I was driving in a car with the boy in the passenger seat. All of a sudden he slid over on the seat and bit me, sucking the blood out of me. I woke up so afraid, I couldn't think of anything else but that dream.

The next night I had another dream with him in it, but this one wasn't scary at all; this one made me sad. We were lying on the top bunk of a bunk bed. At first I couldn't focus on his face, but I knew who it was. I wasn't afraid. I wanted to be there and find out who he was. My parents were there as well as my older brother, but my younger brother was missing. They were preoccupied with something and didn't even seem to know we were there. All

of a sudden the boy said he had to go. I begged him not to, but he said it was his time. I remember feeling sad; then all of a sudden I was right in the middle of my parents and my brother. They were all looking at me, and all I could do was scream the name "Jayme." For some reason I just felt that I somehow knew that was his name. For a couple of days that's all I thought about. I wanted to see him again so badly I hoped each night that I would dream of him.

As I'm sure you've guessed, my dreams about Jayme stopped right there. Although my dreams stopped my thoughts about Jayme didn't. Finally one day, maybe out of desperation, curiosity, or pure frustration I asked my mother if we knew anyone named Jayme. She asked me why I wanted to know, which surprised me. I wasn't sure what to say at first. I wondered if she would think I was crazy for actually believing in a silly dream I had. I was torn. Should I hit her with the, "I was just wonderin'," or should I tell her about the dreams?

Finally, I answered her. I told her all about my dreams. At first she looked at me kind of weird, like she thought I was crazy; then she told me to sit down.

When I got up after talking to her, I wished I hadn't asked a thing. Knowing that I was right about the way I felt my entire life was too much for me to handle. Then again, I had to deal with the facts; after all, I had asked about them.

My mother told me a story I could never forget in a million years. She told me a story that made complete sense. She told me the story of my twin brother, Jayme. When I was born, there was more than me; there was also my twin brother. He had something wrong with his blood and died almost the instant he was born. His name was Jayme. When my mother told me this, a lot of things made sense. My feelings that something was missing, that I was alone, made sense. My getting along with boys rather than girls made sense. My dreams made sense.

Picture

Melissa Andras

If I could see inside your heart,
I wonder what I'd see.
A crashing waterfall to start
all the oceans there would be.
A ship sailing in the wind
of all the breaths you take.
Islands of hopes
and all the dreams they make.
Would I see a desert,
a dry and sandy place.
Because of all the hurt
that people made you face.
Sometimes I think I'd see
a frigid mountain range.
For people made you cold
cause they all made you change.
But I remember long ago,
when I knew you well.
What was in your heart
you would freely tell.
But now you keep your dreams

locked behind steel gates.
And your love no longer beams
for it has turned to hate.
So if I saw inside your heart
I wonder what I'd see.
The dreams I knew you'd never start
or all the pain to be.

Pride

Melissa Andras

I remember many years ago,
awhile before we met.
There were many things I didn't know,
wasn't ready for them yet.
The whiteness I call innocence
was running through my veins.
Now dullness and corruption
seem to be all that remains.
The world was a bright place,
not the blackness I now see.
The moment I looked at your face
you took that light from me.
Now the coldness in my heart
from when you placed it there
has helped me master the cruel art
of hurting those who care.
When I look into your eyes,
love's not what I see
and every tiny little lie
brings the goodness out of me.
You can keep all that you took
but I'll no longer stay.
You can take one final look
but there's nothing you can say.
I'm leaving with a little hope
and so much misery.
Somehow I've found the strength to cope,
you left my pride in me.

Fungi

Miguel Barron

Feeding on death, unfeeling, remorseless
Slowly it feeds, growing ever larger
to have its children. Little spores
of life that will grow and feed on decay.
Single-mindedly, it continue its
work, ignoring the world around it.

Baiting Destiny

Miguel Barron

Sun scorched earth rose from the ground, twisting in the air like a living creature. A small tent lay at the center of the storm. Howling winds buffeted the tent, threatening to overturn it. For countless minutes the maelstrom attacked the dwelling. Then, it stopped.

The flap at the door of the tent opened. Two men emerged from the opening, warily eyeing the surrounding landscape. Dunes spread as far as the mens' eyes could see. One of the men, a long scar running down the side of his face, sniffed the air.

"Is the sand devil still present, Jerich?" the other man said in a low hushed voice.

"It is gone, Zekeal."

"I have never seen a devil that angry," Zekeal said as he began to undo the tent's moorings. "Why do you think it attacked us?"

"Men are not meant to understand the spirits," Jerich said. "Their will be done."

Zekeal finished bundling up the tent. He reached into a fold in his tunic and pulled out a small decanter of oil. Carefully he poured two drops of oil on the tent fabric. Jerich walked over and bent over the bundle. He muttered something and passed a hand over the bundle.

They left the tent on the sand were it could bring luck to other wayfarers.

"The trail leads this way," Jerich said from a crouched position.

Zekeal nodded.

"I sense that the den is near," Jerich said. "Are you ready?"

Zekeal nodded.

"Come on then," Jerich said. "Destiny awaits."

Zekeal took a deep breath.

Jerich stood at the opening of what looked like a cave. Zekeal watched Jerich walk up to a small rock placed at the entrance. With casual motions Jerich struck the rock with his walking stick. The blows echoed into the bowels of the cavern.

"I will lead the parent away," Jerich said. "You must enter the nest and take an egg."

"What if the mother returns before I escape?" Zekeal questioned.

"The spirits' will be done."

The ground began to tremble under their feet. A loud roar came from inside the cave.

"Hide behind those boulders," Jerich said as he began to run.

Jerich was knocked off his feet as the blood worm thundered past. Hundreds of legs pushed the giant worm after its prey.

The moment the worm ran passed from sight, Zekeal ran into the cave.

The walls of the cave were covered with moisture. Zekeal stopped to lick up some of the moisture, before continuing down. This was Zekeal's first time in a blood worm's den. The amount of moisture in the den was overwhelming. But the moist walls did not prepare him for the nest. The brood chamber was completely underwater. Two eggs shimmered under the water's surface.

Zekeal carefully reached in and pulled out one of the light blue eggs.

A thundering cry echoed through the cave. Zekeal knew what the cry meant. The old man escaped.

Zekeal tucked the egg into the tunic and ran toward the light.

Zekeal trudged over a dune, making his way to the campsite. He held a hand over his eyes and gazed into the distance. Near the campsite

he saw Jerich sitting with his back propped against a pack. As Zekeal closed the distance he began to feel uneasy.

"Jerich, are you all right?"

Jerich gave no answer.

Zekeal tapped Jerich's shoulder. The man crumpled to the ground.

"Heat . . . too old . . . destiny." Jerich muttered. Sweat beaded on his leathery, scarred face.

Zekeal crouched next to his old friend and lifted his head. He reached into his robe and pulled out the egg. He lightly touched the egg to Jerich's lips. The sweat disappeared from Jerich's brow.

"Destiny . . . spirits . . . damn it."

Jerich took final breath and then lay still.

Zekeal left the old man to rest under the stars. The spirits would do what they will. Zekeal started the journey back to the tribe. One day it would be Zekeal's turn to bait the worm. A breeze began to pick up.

Happy Valentine's Day

Sam Burke

remember the first meeting,
we rubbed crotches to asses
to the retro music
among the slick-backed
credit card Casanovas,
and the tanning bed
clown-faced whores.
we didn't have anywhere
better to go,
we didn't care what the
punks and sluts thought,
we were no better
when we went up against the wall
tied tongues,
I kissed the saline
off your neck and shoulders,
and I put my hands all over you life
a disrespectful Yank would,
you were kind-hearted, drove me home
and kept me warm on the pull-out bed,
to be further disrespected.

I was happy with myself
only to remember extreme beauty
and an accent, it all sent me chasing,
orbiting the globe,
helped to fold up a business,
you turned me back into a monk,
and slapped noble pursuits
back into my face

Joliet

Sam Burke

Joliet, I don't care for your inner city,
painted up pretty, prostituted
    like a French whore,
not caring how filthy
    the inner-exterior might be,
Northwest, Southwest,

take me down to ghetto areas,
the old granary
where the graffiti Indians
are painted on thick,
with paint cans stolen from the five-'n-dime

Take me down to the old decrepit
    ghetto gin mills
where we might rest our elbows firmly
on old oak bar tops, till they're sore,
reminisce about the good old days
when union boys came from all over
to work in this strong young city,
now old and decrepit, both legs in the grave

Take me down to the ghetto
    to mix with authentics,
the bare-boned philosophers,
take me down deep, where sounds
    of gunfire
are as common as bird-song,
and then maybe we'll talk
    about a free country
and what a truly free society is,
free expression and suppression

Take me into your heart
where the joints are rolled thick
in hollowed-out King Edward wraps,
none of this light green over-dried shit
from the west side

Take me down to those old train tracks
built high with thousand pound
    cinder blocks,
to the old E J and E
    for the rolling train sounds -
eerily slow, steel on cold steel, in them
listening to the mingling spirits
    of those strong arms,
the real men who nailed down rails by hand
with thick-muscled fingers,
when one or two hits drove in spikes solid,

take me into their genuine camaraderie,
the jokes, the deep-lunged laughter,
the common talk of life and its obstacles,
give me a break from the high brow
    arm chair discussions

take me down to the wretched canal,
where blotted bodies are extracted
    here and there,
let's walk along it and talk and think
    of the concrete laborers,
the authentics that broke backs to pour
    and shovel in its foundations,
the strong backs aching proudly
    to build up this land,
admirable, happily-callused hands,
traits of the first patriots of land

Take me by the steel bridge, to see the
iron workers hanging, suspended.
bolting together our foundations
take me in deep, into the real conversations
among these bare-boned philosophers
we won't mind the company
    and despair of common men

Punk from the Old Neighborhood

Sam Burke

Said you're getting ready for the millennium,
piling up guns,
like we used to collect matchbox cars,
said you've been reading the Bible -
Revelations, but ain't through it yet,
a new missionary man with,
forty-minutes of scripture under your belt,
common soldier of fortune,
diggin' deep for a cause
gettin' ready for the war,

We used to fight it
in the sand box,
shootin' army guys with rubberbands;
I was the Germans and Japs,
you the land-of-the-free,
but you took it further,
you lit the plastic army guys on fire
in private,
burnt your hands badly

Now gettin' ready with those
white-robed friends,
ones that barely graduated high school,
and those huntin' trips,
shootin' baby squirrels out of their nests,
anything to get a shot at,
pigeons, blackbirds, rabbits uneaten
deerslugs or buckshots, it don't matter

Crashing Lightning

Sam Burke

crashing lightning
ten mile long symbol
creatures scatter into
more silent burrows
for safeguard,
unknowing and unity of
hard-sent clamor.
or the rapture from,
majestic uproar

Trees lose grip of sky,
assume manic dances
in an unseen composer's
grand symphony

Requiem

Josh Dipert (Alumni)

There was nothing else in this world.
No one waited around him.
None called out his name.
There was no physical body
constraining his soul.
He was free.
Victory would be his.

Jacob opened his eyes and allowed the world to come flooding back into his realm of possibility. The fans screamed his name, some with

derision, some with scorn, but still others with the wilding excitement that anticipated the spectacle that was to come. They alone realized what he had come here to do, and saw that there was no other possibility for him except victory. This shared secret brought a smile to that famed, grim facade as his opponent entered the arena that would be his home for these last few minutes of life.

A worthy opponent he had been in the past; summer evenings of wrestling matches ended in laughter, quick and brutal flurries of punches and kicks that terminated with a helping hand. No longer would such things be allowed. This time, it was real, and one had to lose.

Michael, while a fan favorite for his looks and boyish charm, would not be walking away tonight. The only help he would be able to hope for would be a quick death, the only hand that would help him up would be the kind and loving hand of God. His body was already damned; perhaps his soul would be saved.

The violent staccato beat that emerged from the speakers above announced that it was now his turn to enter the ring. The path retreated before him, slowly backing downhill to the eight-sided arena that would end the life of a smiling young man who had once shared a common childhood. The path was shorter now. Up ahead he could see Michael waiting for him, nodding to acknowledge eye contact, but then averting his eyes to escape the gaze that bore down upon him. The crowd was delirious with anticipation, and had they noticed the exchange, they would have known that they could return to their homes; the fight was already over.

They didn't. Instead, groping hands reached out to touch the flesh of the champion they had chosen, quickly jerking back fearfully once contact had been made. The screaming howl of the guitars was barely discernable over the roar of the crowd, the stadium pulsed alive like a hungry beast, one that would not be sated without a sacrifice of blood. Jacob, now the executioner, reached the latched door of the gate.

He moved slowly as he removed the cloak and hat that had been his armor on the way down. Now, in the bowels of Hell, he would need it no longer. Jacob reassured himself that his hair was pulled back properly, checked the straps on his shin guards. He examined the gauntlets, making certain that they would not come off, and made one last final examination of his boots. He could not delay it any longer. He looked at Michael and saw that there would be no true challenge tonight.

Michael's eyes showed no fear, no hesitation, and no fire; his soul had already been saved. All that was left was for the body to be broken. He nodded his readiness to the gatekeeper and began his advance even before the doors were open.

The end is near, Michael.
I am Alpha.
I am Omega.
Kneel before me, for I am Death.

Untitled

Cheryl Elwell

They say there is no rest for the wicked
But there's the eternal question
Am I truly wicked

Ah, yes, me and my ways
My wicked, wicked ways

To know songs
And sing them
With a sad or joyous heart

To know people
And love them
For all their faults

To pour drinks
And toast the meaning of friends
May they always be true

To have a voice
And raise it in celebration of life
In good times and bad

Ah, yes, me and my ways
My wicked, wicked ways.

(untitled)

Cheryl Elwell

Heart of Gold
Heart of Glass
Heart of the bold
You bet your Ass!
hate me, love me,
fear me, befriend me
I am a creature that creates
I am a creature that destroys
I mold the world with my will
I am the flowing water that
chooses to destroy the shore
I am the wolf children
that feed upon their mother
I ignore those in need
I reach out to rich ones in greed
the world is wounded by my arrogance
and shakes at my wrath
I, commanding all the powers given me by
the world that I hurt, proudly raise my head
and call myself . . . human nature.

Tides

Matt Furlane

Listen to them; thousands of men marching in fixed formations,

Stamping the treads of their boots in mud and snow, their faces grim

Reflecting rarely seen horrors, burdens they will carry for life.

Tanks rumbling, tearing up earth like huge garden tillers, thundering like iron giants

Proud of their strength, laughing, shaking the ground.

Stand upright and watch with your mouth agape as a formation of planes
Covers the sky, like thousands of huge steel birds, casting a mile wide shadow
Watch them glide quickly over acres of uneven terrain, hills, and homes,
Feel the steady crisp bass beating of rotor blades penetrate and
Tap against your heart as tons of metal hover above, guarding the middle heights.

Place your hands above your brow and look out toward the ocean,
As the breeze blows across your face see the mighty gray hulls break waves and
Make waves as they sail into the open blue plain.
Look with fear as cold dark shadows silently move beneath the waters surface,
Huge metallic fish, ready to deal death without ever being noticed.

Tremble at the vast, powerful, quick, steel machinery of war, operated by soldiers
Trained to confront and defeat the enemy on the field of battle.
Stand, listen until you hear nations clashing in a sea of rage, listen until
The bloody battles reach a crescendo. Watch until at last, the tide of peace returns.

BUM

Matt Furlane

Course hair, rough face, ragged
beard like roots dangling from
an uprooted weed. Eyes
of desperation, a
predictable path, a
typical look.
Will work for food.
Will lie for food.
Will steal for food.
Will kill for food.
By accident, by nature, by
choice. The crutches
drain and slow. Society moves
faster. Further leaving behind,
falling faster, grasping harder,
cursing louder, staring longer,
sleeping sounder, sliding quicker,
dying sooner.
Falling now, maybe forever.

He's Different. You Know?

Matt Furlane

The kitchen filled with the scent of cooked ham as Frank, a middleage man wearing a t-shirt, sat and flipped through the pages of local morning newspaper. His coffee was on the table steaming.

"Listen to this Phyllis," he said to his wife who had her back turned to him. "Attempted burglary . . . 'suspect described as male black', armed robbery . . . 'suspect described as a male black', auto theft . . . 'male black' . . . every single person mentioned here is black."

His wife kept silent, looking into a frying pay as she moved a piece of sizzling ham back and forth with a spatula.

"Listen to this!" he exclaimed again as he continued reading through the crime reports. "A male black wearing jeans, tennis shoes, and a flannel shirt is wanted in connection with the armed robbery of Joe's Food Mart. That's in my old neighborhood, right near St. Jude's church. Those niggers can't leave anything alone."

Phyllis lifted the pan from the burner and slowly tilted it over a plate until the ham slid off. She turned and looked at Frank. The top of his head was the only part showing and it was turning from side to side.

"Do you have to be so . . . abrasive?" she said holding the empty pan in her hand. The right side of the paper suddenly folded down and Frank leaned to the side.

"What else should I say? Oh, what nice boys they are. This city is going to hell in a handbasket because of them." Phyllis turned around and set the pan back on the stove.

"Scrambled or poached?"

"Scrambled." Frank replied quickly. He sat for a moment staring at the back of his wife and listening to the sound of eggs cracking and their hollow shells being placed on the top of the stove.

"Well, I'm sorry, but that word is the best term to describe those people." He stated matter of factly and returned behind his curtain of news.

Phyllis stared down at the frying pan as she gently stirred his eggs. "You wouldn't say that in front of Harold."

Frank paused for a moment feeling caught off guard. "Harold is different. He isn't shooting or robbing people. He works, pays taxes, and takes care of his family."

"But Harold is just as black as those people you're reading about." Phyllis pushed the scrambled eggs out of the pan with her spatula.

"Honey . . . Is my breakfast ready?"

Phyllis turned around with a plate in her hand, ham on one side, scrambled eggs on the other, and placed it on the table. Frank folded the paper and tossed it on a nearby chair.

"What would I do without you?"

"Probably starve to death."

Frank began to shovel eggs into his mouth and talked while eating. "I'm going down to the food mart today to talk to Joe and find out if everything is okay. What are you going to be doing?"

"I'm going to bring some baby clothes over to Sarah's. I might run some errands later. I should be home at about three or so."

"I should be home at about lunch time." Frank looked around the kitchen for a moment. "Honey. There isn't any toast."

Frank's truck ran over a pothole and everything on the passenger side bounced; an empty lunch box, safety glasses, loose change, and a broken pencil. He looked out the side window as he drove through his old neighborhood, smiling and frowning as if watching a scene in a movie. Over on the corner was his childhood home, now divided into two apartments. The empty lot where everybody played ball had grown over with weeds. A car stood on blocks in front of a lawn he used to cut. Down further was St. Judes church, now boarded up.

Joe's Food Mart was still there after so many

years. A square brick building with a crack on one side and an old neon sign hanging in front. Inside were worn tile floors and four or five short aisles each with a small selection of basic items. Old fluorescent lights hung from a concrete ceiling crossed with pipes and heating ducts. In the back was a deli and a butcher hacking away at large chunks of soft red meat. Near the entrance was the checkout counter with a small magazine rack filled with tabloids. Food prices were posted on signs or hung in the big storefront windows. One of the windows was covered with a piece of plywood.

Joe came out from behind a door in the back wearing an apron with various food stains on it. He was bald on top with gray hair on the sides. His face was aged and distinct in its features. Above his right eye was a small bandage. He walked toward the front of the store and shook hands with Frank, who was standing near the register.

"Frank, I haven't seen you in a while. What brings you here?"

"Well, I read what happened in the paper and wanted to see how things were. Is everything all right?"

"I'm fine. I just got roughed up a little. They took some money and that was it. I got a shot off but it didn't do anything but cost me more money. I'm alive."

"Good to see your okay. This neighborhood is changing, Joe. It's getting a lot darker. You know?" Frank said sourly as he looked out toward the front windows. Joe looked at him for a moment and then at the windows. "What do you mean?"

"I mean . . . niggers. The whole neighborhood is full of them now. I remember when this area was clean and never had any crime. Now it's all changed. Because of them. I wish there was a way to get rid of them, you know?"

Joe looked around quickly and then whispered, "Keep it down; some of my regulars are black."

As they talked about the neighborhood a black man walked out from behind one of the aisles with a gallon of milk in one hand. Franks' eyes widened a little when he noticed him.

"Morning, Harold, stocking up a little, I see." Joe said nervously.

"Yeah, the kids are hollering because there isn't any milk. Same thing every Saturday." Harold looked over to Frank as he placed the milk in front of the register. "Hi, Frank. Haven't seen you in a couple of weeks. What brings you here?"

"I used to live in this neighborhood. I wanted to stop by for a visit. How's work? I heard that the plant may close next year."

"That's just a rumor. The one up north will close before ours will." Harold opened up his wallet to pay the cashier and looked to Joe. "What happened to your eye?"

Joe put his hand over his eye feeling the bandage. "I was robbed. He gave me a good knock and emptied the register. It was around closing time on Thursday night."

"Did they catch the guy?" Harold asked looking concerned.

"No, they're still looking for him."

"That's too bad. What did he look like?"

"Well, he was about six foot and a half, tall, curly hair, flannel shirt, tennis shoes . . ."

"What color was he?" Harold asked innocently.

Joe became uncomfortable having tried to avoid saying it. "Well . . . he was black." Then added, "About six foot and a half," so as to not leave the word 'black' hanging all by itself.

The cashier handed Harold his receipt and he began walking out. "I hope they catch him. I've got a wife and kids and I don't want to be

worrying about them every time they go shopping."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. See you later." Joe said semi-relieved.

"Yeah, take it easy, Harold." Frank said.

"Not today. I have to cut the grass." He waved and walked out.

Frank looked at the door for a moment. His blood pressure began to decrease. He turned to Joe. "Why didn't you tell me he was in here. I wouldn't have been shooting off like an idiot."

Joe's eyebrows furrowed. "I didn't know. Besides I haven't got anything against him anyway. He's a good customer. You're the one who doesn't like him."

Frank stepped back with a look of surprise on his face. "What? I never said I didn't like him. My wife is friends with his wife; we get along fine."

"I don't see how," Joe said, a little amazed. "Before he showed up it sounded like you were ready to lynch everyone in the neighborhood."

Frank's eyes shifted back and forth, "Well, I didn't mean Harold. He's different . . . you know?" Joe shrugged and decided it was time to get back to work.

They shook hands again and Frank walked out holding the door open a moment while a black woman and her children entered. The woman said thank you and Frank nodded.

Driving back home through the old neighborhood Frank rolled up his windows and looked straight ahead.

Night's Dream, Today's Obsession

E.L. Gallagher

Last night won't clear out of my mind
I can't even function today
    when I think of it
It blows me away to recall the things I saw
And the feelings it resurrects-
    Oh, how I love it!
Have you ever had a dream
    you want to relive?
Oh, what I'd do... Oh, what I'd give!

Drama

Erica Gallagher

My ideas are so rich
I can't even afford them
That's why, before I go to sleep
I religiously record them
But none account for half of which
Make me feel quite as rich
As you!

Speed Queen
Erica Gallagher

Crash! Crash!
Migraines like a sudden surge
Of poisoned food I wish to purge
Bang! Bang!
There goes my head
A million swords beneath my bed
Like a twist of bad fortune
I've run out of luck
A rock and a hard place
Me, I am stuck!
Pow! Pow!
Such a slap in the jaw
Agony this harsh is against the law!

Placebo
Erica Gallagher

A cure all
When you were all
I could put my hand on
Now someone has tied them together
What happened to the freedom I once knew
What happened to you?

Like medication
I took without hesitation
I could count on you
And you helped me through the day
What happened to the 24 hour pharmacy
That kept you in a bottle for me?

Placebo, all in the head
I used to think I'd be dead
If I didn't pop them on the hour
Now I know I can live without
The tiny pills you had me believe
Would take your place when you'd leave.

Untitled
Gebhardt

All I did was ask for lunch
All I did was
accept it
All I did was
eat it
All I did was
enjoy it

All I did was lead him on?
All I did was tell
him I wasn't
looking

All I did was
crush him
All I did

And all I
could do
is care
less

Untitled
Gebhardt

undecided
words not there
to say . . .

the least of your worries
you slide down
the wall

your shirt catches
on a nail
and

tears . . .

leaving a gaping
hole

big enough
to
crawl
out
of

Not Fair
Gebhardt

His Problem
Not Yours

I Didn't Ask To Be
AN Object
Of
Adoration

Make It Stop

What Does
He
See
Anyway

Must Be Blind

Make It All Go Away

FLUSH

Untitled
Gebhardt

see! I told you so!

you can't even
fool yourself
anymore.

BITE ME

SCREW ME

triple doggy dare ya

loser

bet you won't

I WIN!

I WIN DAMMIT!

All of the worlds
my
STAGE

only
problem

Curtains Closed

Untitled

Jeff Gilleland

I want to be larger than life
Worshipped by thousands
of high-school kids
I want to be a mega-star
And get the hell out of this room

I want to fly away
Fame and fortune could take me
to the pinnacle of what life means
Let me go
I want to be
Larger than life
Larger than anything that precedes me
And get the hell out of this room

If I could be on the cover of "Teen"
My picture would hang on the walls
of psycho 13 year-old girls
That'd be cool
And maybe it'd get me out of this room

Thought I'd Share This with You

Jeff Gilleland

Tranquil thoughts have escaped and bitterness pervades
Emotions run rampant, but unsowed, left to whither and die
What was it that stole all originality and replaced it with an undying need for
humankind to conform with what is considered normal?
Who invented normal anyway?
I certainly had nothing to do with it
They are the freaks who make no time for thoughts, dreams
Just pay their fucking taxes and try not to think
Just do it!
It should be easy. Hell, maybe it is.

A Little Angry
Jeff Gilleland

Same old shit, different day
Isn't there another way
To conquer what success means to us today?
Living in a world built by people
    with no idea
        That our mentality
        Could turn into
        Brother against Brother
            Against
            Ourselves
I should be happy
I am still alive
Nonetheless, anger overrides my mind

Afraid of the Government
Jeff Gilleland

You drained off the energy
That was once abundant in our lives
Stole the pride
We held so dear
Captured the feeling
Which left us numb with desire
Left us standing
In fear

JUMP!
Ann Marie Girard

Come, join my tranquil world
A singularly beautiful land
Of wildflowers and ivy
Castles and high towers
Of unicorns and waterfalls
Where the silver sea calls
To you to come and play
within its sunny bay
And upon its shores.

Stand upon the mountain
Wade in the crystal stream
From valley to hill
Wish on every star
You'll never know how far
A dream can go
Or the pleasure a heart can show
Until you jump!

Rainbow Lightning
Ann Marie Girard

For a brief second
Magnificent, dazzling hues
Flash across the vast
Midnight landscape
    In a macabre dance.

As if darkness shunned
A momentary lapse of blues
Blink-of-an-eye quick
Too quickly did escape
    Before I was given a chance.

To scan the shadows
Or move to soothing shelter
In a bevy of storm-wracked trees
Paralyzed by fear
    Of the twilight flickering.

A glimpse of the tomorrows
A world shown helter-skelter
By a time-warp frees
Up only a single tear
    In Rainbow lightning.

penciled in

Lola Gish

paint a picture, paint it ugly
in twenty years you'll be reminded by tears
of how ridiculous you have festered into being
and how blind you've become by seeing
there you go . . . one more penny-saving hypocrite.

draw attention to yourself, child
in a few moments you'll break out
    into torments
of hysteria and uncontrollable commotion
risking the minor half of your emotion
starving your intellectual potential and feeding your ignorance.

Clown

Lola Gish

Somebody take these prayers
Somebody who really cares
Burn them until ash remains
Burn them until darkness reigns
No more smiley faces jacking up this place
Nothing but a dismal face
Mock the evil, for something
    in them attracts me
Something about their sadness attacks me
And I crave that same sadness day
    in day out
Sometimes I wish happiness learned
    to stay out
Because little is to be had
By an emotion that leaves you sad
So I'd rather struggle to swim in sorrow
Than drown in a falsehood given tomorrow
Someone take these underlying notions
Someone strangle these artificial emotions
Burn them until they become dust
That rests upon the arms of trust.

The Everlasting
Lola Gish

I know you can hear me now, tiny voice
I know you love me, and that's nice
I know your little boat can't make it
Down the river of cruelty, you can't take it
I want to be your harbor.

I know you can touch me, gentle fingers
I know that pain inside you still lingers
I know your fragile heart has a destination
Let me be your oasis.

I know you have been hurting for too long
I know what it's like to be wrong
I know how bad you want to get me
The day I die, don't forget me
I will haunt you.

I know there's so much I don't know
I know we will never have a chance
    to let go
I know where you see me in your mind
But I don't want to be that easy to find
So I will hide from you.

Chick Nasty
Lola Gish

an empty tower
waiting to be filled
a starving nomad
wanting to be killed
but will he survive
and become stronger?
you see, I know
love made me live longer.

an unhappy tiger
craving healthy prey
a naive mute
having so much to say
but will she speak
and become vocal again?
will she feed her desires
or will she bury them?

Tourniquet
Lola Gish

Controversy equals a word called "love"
Pounding like a vein under a tourniquet
So many fallen ill to the disease
That sucks them in and takes them away.

Love is equal to the unborn ideas
That roam aimlessly
    down a blue highway inside
Someday they'll get off the exit ramp
And find a new place to reside

Love pounds like a vein under a tourniquet
But only real love burns like a fire
I've never been in love before
What keeps me going is desire.

Mute
Lola Gish

I like my young life
Should I save it from sobriety?
Or wallow in the condemnation
Of a fucked-up society?
Maybe I should be me.

I like my cigarettes
Should I buy cartons every Sunday?
Or try and be reasonable
About a habit I said I'd quit on Monday?
Maybe I should be me.

I like my music
Should I tread to the unknown lands
Of previously unreleased records
By previously unreleased bands?
Maybe I should be me.

I like my style
Should I buy a new jersey
    to match these blues?
Should I sell and old pair of socks
To go with an old pair of shoes?
Maybe I should be me.

I like myself
When I look in the mirror,
    I see a million faces
How often do you get to try out
    people for size?
I guess the heart beats in two different places
One in your chest, one somewhere else . . .

Never can I be myself.

Foul-Weather Friends
Chris Helin

Purge out all the pain you feel
and they'll lend an eager ear-
stimulating sympathy for a trusting tear.

You offer them your sadness
seeking empathy for despair.
But snakes in Sunday's best
only pretend to care.

Smugly superior sponges
soaking up the dirt-
secret satisfaction in your hurt.

But the day they see you happy
is the day they'll turn away.
Good fortune is only good
when it comes their way.

Sunday Night
Chris Helin

Chubby fingers playing checkers
cones of Iscream, double-deckers
Homework-free and free-for-all
building memories ten feet tall

Movie mania and video games
rumbling, tumbling, calling names
Trinket-bearing-Grandma visits
Prompting "I want that one!" fits
In the bathtub, giggling, scrubbing
with Mr. Bubble, rub-a-dubbing
Antsy-pantsy undercovers
nighttime scary story lovers
Mommy's fed up, tummies fed
Simon says it's time for bed.

Work

Karen Henning

In just forty-five minutes I will be off to my job. A mundane job for a mundane girl. Video after video passing through my hands. Making popcorn again and again until it is time to clean the machine. Smiling and saying "Hello" to customers entering the store. Talking the basic bullshit with my co-worker. Telling them the few bits and pieces about my day and about my life and listening in return. Every few months, buy a birthday card and write nice things in it. Go to another semester of college when the time comes. Make $5 an hour to do something that is completely trivial to everyone's else's life. A while ago I realized something else. That almost everyone's job is trivial to everyone else. That when you stop at McDonald's to get a burger, it's five minutes out of your day and yet someone else wears a name tag and plasters a smile on (maybe) every time they walk in the door. It is their job, and never again will they walk in McDonald's like they did when they were a little kid. Now they cannot walk in the door and not know what the back office looks like. Most people probably never give one second's thought to the back office. And once every one or two weeks, they go inside to pick up a paycheck to pay their bills and buy some socks or underwear at Walmart.

I will never again walk in the video store or Dairy Queen or Big Apple Bagels and feel the way I did when I was just a customer. No matter how hard I try. Work is work and not the bane of my existence. I try to remember that when I walk into JC Penny's or Jewel-Osco or anywhere. Those people who are there are just like me when I'm at the video store. They don't want a headache, and they don't want a rude person insulting them or yelling at them or complaining about something they cannot change. They just want to get some money to pay their bills and buy some goddamn underwear.

The Little Girl in Me

Karen Henning

there is a little girl that comes into my work every day. i wonder sometimes what her life is like. i wonder why people neglect their chil-

dren. i wonder how they could not bathe them and provide clean clothes for them to wear and make sure they do their homework and read them bedtime stories, and i wonder how it is possible for them to not love their children. i wonder what kind of a crappy world lets this happen. i just don't understand. i wonder what kind of a culture we live in that plops its children in front of the TV instead of reading to them. i wonder what kind of a culture we live in that is so heartless and cold, that cries more for the loss of a crazed musician who kills himself than a little girl who died of leukemia. i wonder what it could possibly take to make everyone wake up out of the stupor they seem to be living in. i wonder lots of things, every day. i wonder when it will be that we destroy ourselves out of apathy and misunderstanding and hatred and negligence. will it be in my lifetime? is that why i haven't had a good night's sleep in over four years? i wonder about this little girl. i wonder if she will ever see for herself grand opportunities to leave the lifestyle of her parents and create for herself a decent, normal life. i wonder how many times a day someone tells her i love you. i wonder how many time she's seen her mother fall down the stairs of their mobile home drunk. i wonder how many times she's gone to school embarrassed about what she is wearing. i wonder how long she has ever gone without a bath. i wonder when the last time was that she had a balanced meal for supper. i wonder if she believes in jesus, i wonder if she knows the reason i don't is because there are children like her all over the country and world. unwanted, unloved, underfed, uneducated, un-everything that a human being needs. no god would let people experience life like that. i wonder if that man was right, that he believes this is hell. it would make sense of a lot of things. is this some sort of punishment? to see this, every day. to recognize this as a wrong in the world every single fucking day. i can't just forget this little girl and all the children like her, the trailer park kids, i call them. i don't really like any of them, but it sometimes bothers me to know that they would be completely different little boys and girls had they been wanted, loved, raised by decent people in a healthy environment. but i'm not too stupid to not see that it is a circle of events that is hard to break, that the chances of them ever having a life any different for themselves some day is slim. and it bothers me that i use their situation as some sort of excuse for their behavior. i shouldn't have to. it's a valid excuse, but i expect more from people. what's ever going to change? i can't fix what i perceive to be everybody else's problems. i wonder about myself. i wonder how long i can live like this. because i have no idea.

My Secret Place

Cheryl Hiller

When I was a child, there was one place my friends and I would go to be away from everyone else in the neighborhood. It was peaceful and relaxing being there. It was a small creek hidden in a wooded area near my friend's house.

There were four of us that spent time there just talking in private about things that were

bothering us as young teenagers. We talked about love, hate, pressure we felt, and how we would deal with certain situations that would come up. We would leave early in the morning and pack our lunches.

The sight of the creek was as beautiful as we could imagine. There was a small wooden bridge that we would sit on and hang our feet down in the water. The tiny rocks and pebbles in the water sparkled like precious gems, if the sun was shining exactly the right way on them. There were bunches of wildflowers all different colors of red and purple that grew around the creek. The flowers would elevate over the waterbank, and the reflection would show in the water. It looked like you could see double the amount of wildflowers. It was so beautiful.

When I would close my eyes, I felt the warm sunshine touch my face. On hot, humid days, my friends and I took off our shoes and socks and walked through the cool water. I remember how the mud squeezed between my toes and the soft waves brushed against my ankles. The gentle breeze filled my lungs with a breath of fresh air.

I would sit on the bridge and listen to the leaves blowing in the wind. As the wind blew, I could hear the gentle ripples of water flowing underneath the bridge. The birds would sing on a sunny day and fly across the creek, then they would stand on the shallow end of the water and flap their wings happily against the cool wetness.

The smell of the colorful wildflowers was amazing. I will never forget how healthy and new they smelled. The jasmine scent was so strong yet also sweet. After a rainfall, the mixture of flowers and wet leaves filled the air with a pure fragrance. I would gather a bouquet in my arms and inhale the aroma. I also recall some peppermint leaves that grew right next to the flowers. The smell was spicy. It tasted minty and refreshing, a nice herb to have around after my friends and I ate our peanut butter sandwiches.

Today I am so glad that I had some place to go when I needed to think. The atmosphere settled my thoughts. When my children are older, I will show them this special place too. Nature herself is often the best mother we can know.

Steamed

Cheryl Hiller

Lying in porcelain
Surrounded by an essence
of white fluffy clouds
With scent of lavender
Touch of lilac
a soft tune dancing in my head
Sipping spicy drink
Forceful jets
Striking bare skin
Humid moisture upon the walls
Feeling very enfeebled
Reluctant to return
to civilization

Kokopelli
Ancient Native American Folktale
Shirlene Holden

Kokopelli . . .
    Known for his melodious notes
        resounding
            inviting.

    Warming the air
        with his mighty magic flute.

    The music
        airy
        inviting
            resounding across the sky.

He fooled the mighty eagle
    into giving the Hopi their homeland.
Can you hear the music?
The music of Kokopelli.

The Competition
Shirlene Holden

We celebrate a rare friendship
My best home-girl and I

We pledged the deepest
Vow of loyalty two women can make . . .
Never to ever let a man come between us.

Then came rod.

Men like rod never deserve a capital "R"
because in essence they are not
"real men"
but boys in disguise.

A competition
without victor:
We both had rod.
But lost each other . . .
our rare friendship
My best home-girl and I.

My daddy was a cowboy, I'm gonna be a Daddy
by I.denver

-hexed by a loveborrowed.
riders aren't tough when
their hearts are made of fool's gold.
    -so I say

        "Hey, can I
        borrow a paradigm." "It seems
    I've lost my cents
        of introspection."

    I rode - - -

Anger fled when guilt strolled in.
-Begging for a * Ceasefire *
from a superego sinister friend.

He left a mark similar to a scar,
but not as traceable.

-more like a stirrup leaves on an Arabian-

At 1st,
gently
rubbing
but after
awhile
gushing for existence;
the blood's gone now- washed

away with the sunrise.

[skinny little yawner's face the day cheekbones stretched]

I.denver

wondering when pappy's coming home.
They guess if each day is their last.
Does fate have a wandering eye?
Does he tend to look the other way?

Autumn falls

I.denver

w/
Curtain
calls: a dry wall experimental patient.
somewhere
between

ozone

and

shag carpeting,

lies-heartbreak
in < appropriate
Clothing.
Bare c
up
boards -sing
"no play" free
Pet.
Plaid shirts

match classy chassis
Lampshade.

Soiling separate soils

well-versed

in-brick read

Novels.

Untitled

I.denver

I ride on -=-
tired from each bednight brothel-
remorseful till death's duty call.
too proud for forgiveness and
lonely for one thing; that's all.

Chapter One
The Meeting
(A Novel)

Mike Kalata

He didn't think of himself as ordinary, but even his name reeked of plainness. Joe was of average height, average weight, average build. Who did he think he was kidding? He was average.

He could just blend into any crowd, which would have been great if he was a secret agent or something equally as exciting, but he was an accountant. He had felt like he was "somebody" when he was with Mary, but that was over. Why did I agree to meet them, Mary and her new "friend" Jerry, he wondered as he kicked himself for having agreed to this meeting. After almost a year of learning to be "someone" without Mary by his side, he was beginning to feel confident and comfortable alone. But each time he would see or talk to Mary, he felt himself slipping back into his old ways.

He wondered if it was true that Jerry wanted to meet him as Mary had said or if this was a plot that Mary had concocted to humiliate him. He was very wary of anything she said, because he thought that she was still very upset over the custody battle for their two daughters, which Joe had won, "if there are ever any winner's," as his attorney had continually reminded him.

Joe remembered Mary's personality, which had made her stand out in even the largest of crowds. Perhaps, that was what had drawn him to her, but it was also why they were ex-lovers. He could still feel the brittleness of her bright auburn hair and the smoothness of her round face in his memories. Nostalgically, he smiled, remembering that her hair had been black when he had met her fifteen years ago. He thought that color looked better on her. Whenever Joe remembered his time with Mary, whether he was thinking of the good times or the bad times, he always found himself remembering the sex. Curiously, he thought, had that been all we had between us, good, no great, sex?

It was a cold and windy Midwestern night. The wind cut through whatever you were wearing and exposed your nakedessed. There was a hint of snow in the air, and there wasn't a star to be seen in the sky. The bright, sterile lights of the restaurant almost seemed inviting from where Joe sat in his pick-up truck at the edge of the parking lot. Inside, he hoped, Jerry and Mary were waiting for him. He had no interest in knowing anything about Mary's new love. He was quite comfortable thinking of him as a creep and a loser, and not knowing more. Ignorance was bliss, and what I don't know can't hurt me, thought Joe. He felt somehow respon-

sible for her happiness and well-being, so he needed to meet Jerry. While he wanted to be sure that she was being treated properly, he hoped, at the same time, that she was miserable without him.

The alarm on his watch went off. It was time to meet them. He had to leave the warm cocoon of his pick-up truck and venture across the frozen wasteland into enemy territory. He had not been to this restaurant since he and Mary had separated. This had been her place when they met and she retained custody when they split. How many nights had we come here for dessert or coffee, he pondered. He had been a regular here. He had known the waitresses, the bus boys and cooks. Would it be the same or would he be treated like a stranger like he was before he and Mary had met?

He walked briskly to the door. He pushed his way through the revolving door; he could feel the warm air from inside embracing him as the icy grasp of the bitterly cold air from outside loosened. Once inside, he made a quick survey of the territory. It was much as he had remembered it. Again, he hoped that they had beaten him here and had been seated in a booth. He didn't want to have to wait awkwardly for them and he desired the privacy a booth would provide.

As he made his second scan of the area, he saw Mary. He was in luck; they were there and in a booth. However, he was in trouble, too. He could feel his heart rise at the sight of her and then quickly drop when her companion turned to look at whom she was waving at. The hostess asked, "Would you like a seat at the counter or a table?" Without even looking at her, Joe dryly replied, "I'm meeting someone and there they are." Slowly he made his way toward the booth where Mary and Jerry were sitting.

As Joe approached, Mary sprung out of her seat. She stepped toward him. She was not as tall as he remembered; actually, she was quite short. She was bigger than he had thought; some people, who cared less about her feelings than Joe, would have called her overweight. Thinking back, Joe realized that he had always overlooked her flaws. Tonight, she was dressed very seductively, proudly displaying her best offensive weapon, her cleavage. He, like most other men, could not help himself; he couldn't keep his eyes from drifting down to sneak a peek. He had naively thought that all women hated being treated like objects, but he knew now that some, like Mary, craved that kind of attention from men.

As she stepped toward him, he hesitated for a moment and took a step back, not wanting any uncomfortable contact with her. She must have sensed his apprehension because she stopped herself from doing what she was about to do instinctively, but he was not just any old friend that she could greet with a hug and a peck on the cheek. What she thought of as an innocent hug would mean much more to him. The two of them stood a couple of steps apart, unable to look at each other, probably for fear of giving into the temptation to relive the past, staring at the other's feet in an eerie silence for a moment or two.

When he got the courage to look her in the eyes, all he saw was the faces of their daughters looking back at him. The hardened heart he had prepared for this meeting was beginning to crumble.

Probably uncomfortable with the silence, she said, "Hi, this is Jerry," as she motioned across the booth from her.

Joe was about two feet from Mary with Jerry still seated in the booth to his right. He had barely acknowledged Jerry's existence with a brief glance. He couldn't stop himself from

saying "It's really good to see you. You look wonderful tonight." She may have looked wonderful or dreadful. He would not have known because he was looking right through her trying not to allow his gaze to fix on her because that would have broken his will to be strong and fight the temptation to throw himself at her.

Mary suggested, "Here, take my seat across from Jerry, so the two of you can talk. I'll take my stuff and wait over at the counter and give you some privacy for your guy talk."

She had a hint of sarcasm in her voice, which was not lost on Joe. Maybe she wanted the two of them to be alone as little as Joe wanted it. She gathered her coat and purse. She leaned past Joe, still stuck in the aisle like an animal caught in the headlights unable to decide which way to move, to give Jerry a kiss. The thick smell of her perfume slapped him hard in the face. She was wearing a lot of perfume these days, he thought. He realized she was covering something. He could smell it on her. It was faint, but it was there under a heavy layer of perfume. He had smelled that scent many times in their fifteen years together. He could tell, he could smell it; he wondered if she knew that he knew she had recently had sex, very recently. The thought both disgusted and delighted him.

After Mary had made her way over to the counter and was safely seated, Joe slid himself into her vacated seat. It was still warm and reeked of her sweet scent. He breathed it all in as if he might never get a chance again. He slipped his coat off. The waitress, who had been viewing the proceedings from a safe distance, approached the table. He remembered her from when he used to frequent this place; her name was Molly. She leaned over and gave Joe a light kiss on the cheek. She whispered to him, "It's good to see you're still among the living. I was getting a little worried. I missed having you around. Coke?" Joe nodded. She straightened up and continued, "Besides the coke, can I get you guys anything else? Appetizers?" Joe's eyes which had been glued to Molly shifted to Jerry as if to ask whether he wanted anything else. Jerry grunted, "Give us a couple of minutes." With that, Molly was off to get Joe's coke.

Joe picked up a menu and hid behind it pretending to look for something to eat. His first impressions of Jerry had not contradicted the image he had developed from the bits and pieces of information he had received from his children. Jerry was a blue-collar, working-class guy. He was a mechanic, or a truck driver, or something like that. He worked with his hands, which were very dirty. He smelled of hard labor. He lived life as it came in all its messiness. He probably never kept a job longer than necessary. He was short and thin, a little man. It was not hard for Joe to imagine Mary dominating Jerry as she had him. His blonde hair was dirty and greasy and grew down past his shoulders. He had not shaved in days. As Joe measured up Jerry, he found himself jealous of Jerry's "simpler" life.

Being the one who had asked for this meeting, Jerry began, "I bet you want to know why you're here. I'm sure you've figured out that it was really my idea for us to meet. Mary was really against us meeting. I think she's afraid we'll compare notes or something like that."

Joe smiled at Jerry's comments. Jerry continued, "How about us getting a couple of appetizers to eat?"

Joe recalled that this restaurant had some good dishes, but he had, also, had some bad experiences with their food. He offered to Jerry, "You have to be careful what you get here. I think it depends on who is cooking. I think that the Combination Sampler was always good. And maybe, we could get an order of fries, too."

"Sounds like a great idea," replied Jerry. He looked around feverishly for Molly and motioned for her to come over to take their order. She brought Joe's coke to the table. Jerry was in a hurry to get their order in and get started on his agenda, so he barked at Molly as if she were his slave and dismissed her as soon as she was finished taking the order. Turning to Joe after Molly was gone, he said, "Now, we can get started. I wanted to meet you, so that I could find out if I'm going crazy or not."

Joe had thought that he was the crazy one for having agreed to come to this meeting. Relating to Jerry on some level, he said, "I thought I was crazy for a long time and finally I had to let go of those feelings. Everyone is a little crazy. The secret is to make sure you're not the craziest person around. What makes you thing you're crazy?" He was pleased to learn that Mary had hooked up with a lunatic, this made him feel somewhat superior.

Jerry pulled out a cigarette and began twirling it between his fingers. Joe did not like smoking. He thought it was a dirty habit of poor, uneducated people. He knew that this was not universally true because he knew some very intelligent people who smoked, but his original theory served his cause at the moment, proving his superiority. He stared at Jerry and said, "We're in the non-smoking section. You're not going to light that here."

"No, I'm not. I just need something to keep my hands busy when I'm nervous," replied Jerry softly. Jerry swirled the last of his coffee around his mug and chugged it down; he held the mug up signaling that he needed service. "Good service is hard to find. Or maybe I'm just overly anxious tonight. Did you ever get the feeling that Mary was keeping things from you? Nothing major, just little things, you know?" He raised his eyes from his coffee mug to Joe as if to indicate that it was Joe's turn.

He didn't want to reveal too much too soon about himself or his relationship with Mary to a complete stranger, but he couldn't hold back. Joe erupted, "Um, well, I guess, I mean, Yes! Mary did keep things from me. Little things at first but they grew until they were out of control. At first it might have been how much sugar she put in my tea, then it was who else she was sleeping with."

There, he had said it, there was no stopping now. "Were you one of the ones she was sleeping with while living with me? I don't understand how she thought she could go out and fuck whoever she pleased, then come home and fuck me, and me not suspect a thing. Didn't she think I might be able to tell? Didn't she think I could smell the other men? Are you afraid she's doing the same thing to you?"

He took a deep breath. He couldn't believe he was talking like that. He may have thought like that, but he had never talked like that. He must have caught Jerry off guard unloading like that because Jerry was just there with his mouth ajar. "I'm sorry, did that come totally out of left field or what? Maybe I should be a little more tactful? Well, say something."

"I'm not sure what to say," stammered Jerry. After composing himself, he started again, "Everything that I'd heard about you, from Mary and everyone else, could not have prepared me for that. I thought you would be very quiet and laid back. I thought I would have to drag things out of you, and I didn't expect to get very far at that. I certainly did not expect this."

Joe finished his coke and looked around for Molly. He motioned to her that he needed a refill. She quickly brought a new glass for him. Before she could leave, he said, "Thank you very much, and Jerry needs a refill on his coffee. And are our appetizers ready?"

"I'll be right back with your food and some

more coffee," said Molly. She returned quickly, skillfully balancing their appetizers and a fresh pot of coffee. Cheerfully she said, "Here you go. Can I get you anything else?"

"No, thank you, we're fine for now," replied Joe. She was focused on Joe, smiling at him, paying little attention to Jerry. Joe had never noticed her before; he had always thought of her as simply a waitress. He returned her smile. Turning his attention back to Jerry, he said almost apologetically, "I'm really not like that. But I've been stewing about that for awhile and, well, it was just waiting to come out. I'm sure you can understand. You know, Jerry, I believe that there are things that no man was ever meant to fully understand. And women are one of those things. I thought Mary was a wonderful woman, but I never quite knew what to expect from her. I could never let my guard down and get comfortable because I never knew what she was going to do next."

He felt some sort of bond forming between himself and Jerry. He wondered if he should risk that bond by saying more. He couldn't stop now. He forged ahead, "I was wondering, did you think Mary was wearing a lot of perfume tonight. And she is really dressed up tonight, if you know what I mean. Do you guys have plans for later?"

"No, we didn't have plans; she is supposed to go out with some of her friends tonight. They were going to pick her up here at about nine," Jerry replied. He looked down at his watch and then over at Joe, "It's nearly ten." Almost in perfect harmony, their heads swiveled to look over to the counter. Mary was gone. "I can't believe she didn't even let me know she was leaving or give me a kiss good-bye," Jerry said regretfully.

Fighting back the glee he felt at seeing this happen to someone besides himself, Joe said, "I'm really sorry. She's done that to me thousands of times. After awhile, I was surprised when she did stop to tell me she was leaving or to give me a kiss." Before he even realized he was saying it, he said, "Did the two of you have sex before coming here? Not that I want to know anything about your sex life, but I can smell it on her when she's had sex, and she reeked of it tonight. I don't want to be the bearer of bad news, but if this conversation is going the direction it seems to be, I feel really sorry for you. It's hard when something that good comes to an end."

Two or three more cokes and four or five more cups of coffee later, after they had polished off their appetizers, Joe no longer thought of Jerry as the enemy. "It's almost midnight. I've got to pick up the girls from their grandparents early in the morning. I need some sleep. I should be going." Apologetically, Joe said, "I'm sorry if I couldn't reassure you that everything was going to be all right. I tried that on myself. It doesn't help in the end." He rose from his seat and grabbed his coat. Jerry stood up and extended his hand to him. Joe shook his hand and slipped him a business card and said, "Call me if you need to talk about this again. Or if you just want to get together." He couldn't believe that he was offering to be Jerry's confidante.

Joe slipped on his coat and reached into his coat pocket to pull out a twenty dollar bill. He unfolded it, smoothed it out, and left it on the table to cover part of the bill and tip. He nodded at Jerry as if confirm that they were understanding each other and turned to leave. He felt a tug at his arm. He turned to find Molly behind him with her coat in her arms. She said sheepishly, "I'm off, now. Can you walk me to

my car?" She smiled at him as she scooped the twenty off the table. He took her coat and slipped it over her slender shoulders, then offered her his arm and walked her to the door.

Untitled

Nicci Knable

In school
we were told to
color with short strokes,
STRAIGHT UP AND DOWN
to walk in two
    single file lines
    separated by sex,
and only to speak
    if we were called on.
We wore the same uniforms
and were taught to believe and
follow the same views.
We were not children to the teachers
    - not individuals -
but walking paychecks they were
forced to put up with every day
Being young and vulnerable
    - too naive -
  we accepted this as normal.

How disappointing it was to discover
it was all just training
            for
                reality.

HELP

Nicci Knable

Why is life so meaningless
We drag on day by day
And what's the point of living
When life just fades away

I sit and wonder all these things
I wish I had a clue
The world is such a fucked-up place
But hell what can I do

Who knows what will become of me
Perhaps I'm here for fun
Or maybe there's a plan for me
Or maybe my job's done

In that case why am I still here
I just don't understand
Someone put my mind at ease
I need a helping hand

Untitled

Bonnie Kodrick

I walked as far as I could walk: one-foot, two-foot, three-foot, four . . .
More . . . and more . . . and more . . .

Meet me there
Or here
Or not.

I saw as far as I could see: mono, bi, trifocal, mist . . .
Less . . . and less . . . and less . . .

Are you there
Or here
Or not?

I felt as far as I could feel: infant, adult, childhood, dead . . .
Bled . . . and bled . . . and bled . . .

Were you there
or here
Why not?

Tribute, Ol' Dog

Bonnie Kodrick

I sat huddled beside the small stove which was burning discarded wood in the small two-room shack. Ghostly shadows lurked on all of the walls, animated by the flickering light from a kerosene lamp. My father was dead and my mother was gravely ill. My security had vanished overnight. I was alone with two strangers who did not know what to do with me. I had to go to the bathroom, but there was no indoor plumbing. Indeed, there was not even a well on the property. So I sat with my hands tucked underneath me, wishing myself back to yesterday.

The man disappeared for a moment into the other room. When he returned, a big ol' black bear of a dog padded in behind him. I did not turn my head, for I was fearful that if I moved, I would wet my pants. The ol' dog came slowly toward me, laid his chin on my lap, looked up at me with only the movement of his eyes, and did not budge for twenty minutes.

Finally acknowledging that I had to go outside to the bathroom, I was given an old kerosene lantern and told to take the dog with me to show me the way. The ol' dog led me out into a blackness I did not realize could exist to a small outhouse about two-hundred yards away. He stood guard outside the door as a terrified eight-year old child began a life of poverty and neglect that was to last for six years.

The ol' dog sensed that I had nothing. He walked the mile with me to catch a school bus, and he was always there to greet me when I stepped down from that bus at the end of the day that had usually been filled with taunts and confusion. He was always eager to see me. I'd swear that he smiled as he bounded back to the shack, never contradicting me, never criticizing me, always accepting my words and my tears with unconditional love and attention. My sanity hinged on an ol' black dog.

Often, to escape when I could not cope, I walked into the deep woods with the ol' dog. He would walk ahead of me a little way, checking the path. One autumn day as I wandered through the leaves barefoot in order to save my one pair of shoes for school, ol' dog ran back and stopped dead-still in front of me. he would not allow me to move. When I attempted to go around him, he moved with me, staying in my path. He would not let me approach the little barbed-wire fence, and he growled his disapproval. We continued to dance along the path, the ol' dog looked up at me and away at the

fence, coaching me to follow his gaze. There in the leaves, just beyond the fence, lay a large, copperhead snake, almost totally obscured by the leaves. The ol' dog had saved my life.

But the ol' dog not only saved me physically; the ol' dog saved me emotionally. If that ol' dog had not cared for me, if that ol' dog had not listened to me, if that ol' dog had not given me warmth from another living being, I do not believe I could have survived the loneliness, poverty and neglect of those years. I clung to the ol' dog to keep from falling off the end of the earth. He made me hang on. He loved me when no one else did.

Thank you, ol' dog. Thank you, Ralph.

Untitled

Bonnie Kodrick

STOP
I brake
S T O P
before I bre ak

Untitled

Bonnie Kodrick

I alone remember.

I, alone, forget.

Bottle Warriors

Bonnie Kodrick

Betraying fingers on childhood-killing hands
reach into the formation of soldier bottles
standing at attention on top of the cabinet.

Recruiting privately
    from the whining cellar
decorating the day's fighters with metals
which dwell in safety-drawers
    to open bottles.

Pouring blood into the wounded to heal
into scars
to cover yesterday.

Prozac Poetry

Bonnie Kodrick

My life's tree has a hole in the trunk
filled with depression
of my grandmother
of my mother
of myself.

The blackness pushes aside the joy
competing for time
to walk unaided
to walk alone
to walking.

The infertile branches reach nowhere
doddering in space
to reach insanely
to reach insane
to reaching.

The shadow voids what I might have had
obscuring my sight
from seeing lightness
from seeing light
from seeing.

Face Both Sides

Bonnie Kodrick

Smiles had punctuated her mouth
with parentheses
and had emphasized her eyes with
exclamation points.

Frowns had bracketed her brow
with additions
and had underlined her hair with
repeated dashes.

Untitled

Bonnie Kodrick

The truthplain grows cold throughWords:
Words I do not nurture
or acknowledge-
Wounding Words
Mocking Words
Unspeakable Words.

Medical-Art

Milly Laux

Medical Art
madly smart . . . but
missed his mark.

Quite the scientific egghead-Joe,
he's years, and his peers . . . apart.
Disease is his foe,
a homosapien ophthalmoscope see.er,
and innards stare-r,
and "Olympic medal" stethoscope wear-er.

He's an on-line trec-tec
who loves to tell people where . . .
to go . . .
sometimes, he even sends them there.
People see only a Smart Alec.

No prescripts for simple calamine lotions,
he prefers giving heart potions.
He's a popcorn undergarment reader
and 'down-right' Mr. Magoo 'healer'.

Quite the sight in white
(skin lighter) . . . yet
a 'Quarrelsome Quarantine Blight',
and his poor accountant wears his debt!

Furthermore-
for those who are simply bruised,
be warned, don't get confused,
you could be transfused.

Oh yes, he loves the transfusion,
his IDEAL illusion,
and amput-twosing.
Some of his victims accusing,
he often sees mountain-'<u>us</u>' suing.

Another of his favorites-
expect Grandeous Incision.
If you're hurt or you bleed,
that would certainly be . . . his decision.

He's Medical Art,
stay away from the . . .
guy.

Far, far, away!
DON'T COME!
STAY APART,
STAY AWAY!
from
Medical Art!

My Grave

Milly Laux

Love is truly felt here.
Spring all around me,
in the pretty tree park,
see the puffy flowered bluffs,
colorful life . . . surrounds.

Cars come . . .
cars go . . .
all day long.

People . . .
lots of them
come . . .
crying, mowing, laughing, trimming
the flower–glutted mounds, so loved.
Me . . . loved.

.....

Gone . . . now,
mow . . . all the love,
winter mood has come.

Brown grass, brown wood
cold gray stones.
Time has forgotten . . . me.

My Ride Home

Milly Laux

Early eve casts gloomy clouds
To groggy foggy skies.
Autumn's obscure drizzle curtains,
A softly stinging snow-smell cries,

Caramel prairie grasses frame
Maroon blooms within ditches.
Leafy towers back the scene.
Quaint paths yield . . . peacefully blisses.

Bruised, skinned bridges, cover yet see
The rivers' rolling boulder, wedged.
Sedate. creek scene, silver sleek,
With icy frosting edges.

Family homesteads overgrown,
Farmhouse gray decaying.
Livestocks gone, sad seeds sown.
Broken fence gates waving.

Yet, from town, my trip transpires.
Beauty rhythm, farm and forest.
Calm and rest, my soul admires.
My heart breathes grateful . . I am blessed!

Healing Warts at Christ's Chapel Assembly of God Church

Susan Sink (Faculty)

The widows came on swollen legs and feet;
the pastor brought his gnarled fingers;
    the parents
of the lost child came
    with their distracted look,
the pianist with a French twist
    to deny the tumor.

They all came down the aisle to pray
for my teenage sister, who had warts.
They believed enough to press their hands
to hers eagerly, wanting God to knot

their joints with His strength, the sap flow
through their spotted skins on its way
    to heal the young.
They were filled with visions of blind eyes
    opened by mud
and spit and by daily TV miracles.
They were tongued inarticulate with hope.

And my sister was a teenage girl
    who hadn't eaten
a full meal in months, or raised her hand
    in class,
or practiced the piano, or clapped
    in astonishment
or praise, or held anyone's hand,
    or even touched anyone.

After attempts to burn the sores away
    and private,
useless family prayers, we admitted our need
and called — and it was clear who answered.
I'd been afraid they would scorn
    the petty request,

afraid my sister would be hurt by the ordeal
    of this love:
stretching blemished hands to those
    who expected
miracles for their children. But it
    was also this simple:
their hands on her hands, their human voices.

It wasn't the healing, ever, that mattered.
It was the love, even done this poorly,
what little we could do
    with what the world allowed:
our battered hands and this God.

Converts

Susan Sink (Faculty)

Lorenzo talked about the suicidal climb
to the top of the electrical tower,
how he leaned into the wind and didn't care
if he fell, so fucked up on drugs he believed
he could fly. He raised his hands
    as to the wind
and I could feel it, the dangerous,
    electric him.

Now it was part of his testimony.
what God saved him from, but I heard too
how glad he was to have defied the world.
Lorenzo was Lorenzo before and after God.
Dave too, with a tattoo
    of Woody Woodpecker
smoking a joint indelible on the back
    of his hand.

Nancy would pick me up for church,
her faith signaled by the car radio.
Christian stations on good days,
rock and roll when she'd had sex, sliding
down the dial, sliding from the faith
that always took her back, in tears,
    in tongues.

Christian. Non-Christian. The fear of God
that kept us from the world.
Once I dared wear a concert button
pinned to my coat at Sunday brunch.
Over plates heaped with hash browns,
Lorenzo and Dave
quoted Scripture until I couldn't eat,
yelled their old selves as example, warning.

What could I say when God was not enough?
How to answer that Woodpecker
    shaking in my face,
Lorenzo shouting verses memorized
    past meaning.
I wanted more. I envied the converts
    who got
their death-defying stunts
    and their lives in Christ.
I did not climb, maintained my safe distance,
knowing
there was no fear like the fear
of the converted.
For all his shouting,
I saw Lorenzo's face pale
when the pastor taught the parable
    of the sower.
The sun scorched, the thorns choked,
    birds ate the seed
on the path. And some fell on rocky ground,
sprung up fast, but withered fruitless,
    without root.

Jill and Jacki

Sharon Thomas

I knew right away who was calling me. "Hi, Jacki."

Jacki has been my best friend since we were seniors in high school. We also went to college together. And she came to live with me in New Hampshire for a time after she got her Masters degree.

"I'm sorry I haven't called you in awhile. I've been so busy," she said.

"It's okay. I've been busy too."

"So how are you doing? How's Steve?"

"I'm fine. He's fine. How's Murphy? How are you?" The usual ritual. A few minor words about me, then I ask the all important question of how she's doing. I won't have to string together another sentence during this conversation.

"Murphy's great. I'm taking her to Europe in November for her fifth birthday."

"Where in Europe?" I asked.

"Amsterdam, Denmark and all over Germany. We're going for two weeks."

"Sounds like fun."

"Some weird things have been happening to me. It's really weird. Do you have time to hear about it?" she asked.

"Sure, go ahead."

"Well, about a year ago when I still worked for J & J, I met this guy named Fritz at this three day conference. 'Fritz' sounds German, but he's Italian, from Rome."

"Uh-huh."

"At his conference, we sat by each other. I don't really remember the conversation we had, but it was great. At the end of the day, I was invited to dinner with some co-workers and asked him to come along. We all went dancing after dinner and had a great time. The next day I was running late. When I came in, I saw an empty seat next to Fritz and sat down. He said he had been saving it for me. We went out to dinner that night. I had to leave early because I had to pick up Murphy from the babysitters. He was walking me to the car when he just grabbed my face and kissed me. Isn't that cool?"

"Yeah."

"I really admired that he had enough guts to just grab me and kiss me right there in the J & J parking lot. So he's been calling me about once a month since then from Italy. This week he was back in the US for the same J & J conference, and he called me. Of course, I left J & J, so I wasn't attending the conference. I met him for dinner one night, and we just had a great time. After dinner, we went back to his room. You know how I . . . well maybe I never told you . . . how I've always liked things from the 1930's?"

"Well . . . " I was going to say not really, but wasn't given an opportunity.

"Well, I've always liked things from that period, the 30's and 40's. You know how I've always liked fountain pens?"

No, I didn't know that, and we'd been best friends for 14 years.

"Well, he pulls out of his pocket this beautiful fountain pen that he said was made in the 30's. And you know how we always used to go to air shows. Well, you got me into that. And you know how I've always liked architecture, how I've always loved Frank Lloyd Wright."

None of this rings a bell.

"And you know how I've always loved Miami since that one time I went there on Spring Break."

She had gone to meet her college boyfriend's family in Miami back when we were undergrads. All I really remembered her saying about Miami was how nice the weather was compared to Illinois. She never mentioned Miami again.

"Well, Fritz says that he thinks he knew me from a past life. He says we were lovers in the 1930's and 1940's. We were both Germans. I was working as an architect in Miami. He was a German pilot working in Cuba. We met and fell in love in Cuba while I was working on a

project. But our affair ended badly. I was too independent, and we argued. He died during the war when his plane crashed in Germany, so we never were able to resolve our differences. Isn't that weird? At first I was just playing along. Then I just got this really weird feeling that this was all so familiar. Do you think this is too weird?"

"Well, I don't really know how I feel about reincarnation."

"I never really believed in it until this week. But I just couldn't shake this feeling. I've been walking around in a fog all week."

"So did he go back to Italy?" I asked.

"Yeah, last night."

"Are you going to see him when you go to Europe in November?"

"Well, I don't know. We kind of had a little fight."

"Why?" I asked her.

"Well, we went to his hotel on Wednesday night after his meeting. I called him from downstairs and asked what he was doing. He said he was actually on his way out to dinner right now and asked for a number so he could call me back. I told him I was in the lobby, and he said come on up. So I stayed in his room while he went to dinner and ordered some champagne and strawberries and had a picnic on his bed. He came back, and we had great sex. Then he wanted me to leave. He told me he knew he was being rude, and he's not normally like this. But he had a presentation tomorrow, and he had to get a good night's sleep, which he couldn't do with me there. I got mad, but not psycho or anything, and told him there is no way I'm leaving at this time of night, especially since I'd been drinking. So I spent the night sleeping in a chair and part of the time on the bed."

"So, how did you leave things?" I asked.

"Well, he gave me a kiss goodbye before he left. He said he thought he was going to be busy that night, but he'd try to see me before he left. He didn't call, so the next day I went to his hotel and dropped off a book on architecture I had bought for him. I know he got the book before he left because I called the hotel, and the concierge said he had given it to Fritz personally. So he's back in Italy now. I think I should hear from him again in a few days, at least to thank me for the book."

Which I knew was the reason she had bought the book, so he'd call her or if he didn't she would have an excuse to call him. Even back in school, she would leave her watch or some other valuable behind when leaving a guy's apartment. Her favorite ploy had been to steal articles of clothing from these guys she's shack up with. This happened so frequently, my nickname for her used to be "Shacky Jacki."

"He should call," continued. "I mean I know I got mad at him. I know he probably is the kind of guy who has a girl in every city. He told me he was living with a girl."

"He did?"

"Oh, yeah. I think that he should call, though, if he can forgive my yelling at him."

"What's to forgive? You were angry, feeling used and expressed yourself. What's there for him to forgive? You didn't do anything wrong."

"Thank you, Jill. That's why I love to talk to you. You're right I didn't do anything wrong I guess I'll see what kind of man he is. And if he doesn't call, it probably isn't going anywhere anyway."

We talked a little bit longer about her daughter, Murphy, and how she'd thrown Murphy's father in jail for violating his restraining order. I found this quite alarming. Bill had been an alcoholic, abusive, adulterous husband. But all

her attention was focused on Fritz and the possibility of love in the future and of course, in her past life. She rang off before I could ask her more questions about Bill. She was babysitting and had to take the kids home.

For as long as I can remember, Jacki has been searching for a man. She's a single mother and a very successful engineer. If you asked her, she would never admit her life is missing anything. Maybe she's not aware, but she is always searching, hunting.

A couple of summers ago, Steve and I drove up to Wisconsin to meet her while she was visiting her mom in Eagle River. She had been living in New Jersey for the last four years. This was the first time I would meet Murphy, and the first time she would meet my husband, Steve. We planned to meet at the bar of a resort where her mom and stepfather worked because we got in to town too late in the evening to meet Murphy.

I had not seen her in four years. She looked great. She had grown her hair long and had really slimmed down. We sat at the bar and ordered drinks. We weren't there more than five minutes before she started. I saw her eyes stray and roam the room as she talked to my husband, Steve. She was like a predator looking for fresh meat.

A couple of minutes later she asked the bartender if he knew if some guy was coming in tonight. She explained he was some guy she had played backgammon with last night. Everything she does, every place she goes is just a new opportunity to meet men. I felt angry that she couldn't concentrate on me or Steve for one evening, especially since I hadn't seen her for four years. But I let it go.

When I think of Jacki, I remember that night, as well as many other nights and stupid acts of desperation. Like the time she was in grad school and dating one of her freshman students. There we were at 2 a.m., slumped down in the front seat of my Mustang parked outside of his apartment waiting for him to come home. I'll never forget the humiliation of stalking that eighteen year-old boy as she waited to confront him about God knows what.

Then there was Chris. Some fellow engineer grad student friend of hers. She slept with him for over a year, loving him. He had a beautiful girlfriend named Beth. He made it clear to Jacki he would never break up with Beth for her. One night, desperate for his attention, she called him hysterical and lied about being attached in a park by some guy, so he would come running over.

There were more serious lies. Two summers ago she was dating a coworker named David, who was about five years younger. He changed companies, and she started seeing less and less of him until she developed ovarian cancer. She told me over the phone one day that the doctors were positive that's what see had. David had been very helpful and consoling as she told him death jokes. She told him she knew he wanted to break up with her, but she didn't care because she needed him right now to get her through this ordeal.

I had already been planning a trip for her; she wanted to visit Italy for three weeks. She had been in love with this Italian guy named Frank for the last year. Another guy who felt she was good enough to fuck but not good enough to bring home to meet his parents. She was divorced, and he was Catholic. So she now loved all things Italian. She said this may be the last trip like this she would get to make, so she was definitely still going. Afraid she was suffering, maybe even dying, I arranged to meet her in Italy. I was going to Germany to be in a wedding, but managed to find time to go and

see Jacki in Florence.

Because my flight was canceled, I ended up leaving for Milan a day late. When I got to Florence, I called Jacki from the train station. She came to pick me up with a young Australian artist in tow. She had met him the night before at some bar. The boy went home, and Jacki and I went back to her room.

I asked her how she was feeling. She told me that the doctors had been wrong. She didn't really have ovarian cancer. She had several ovarian cysts removed by laser a week ago. I asked her if she had any discomfort. She said she had some pain and bleeding.

I asked her how David was doing. She said he had broken up with her. He just couldn't take it anymore. I asked her if he knew she didn't have cancer. She said yeah she had called and told him. Then she asked me not to tell her mom about the cancer or the cysts because her mom would just worry.

At that moment, I knew she was lying. Sex within a week of her surgery should have tipped me off, but I knew she would never spare her mom anything. Jacki sucks emotional support from any source available to her, especially her mother. Lying to keep a man didn't surprise me, but I was surprised that she would lie to me. I spent the next two days in Florence touring the major sights in the company of Jacki and her new boy toy.

I wasn't mad because she'd lied. I wasn't mad because our reunion had been invaded by yet another male. I was mad because she told me I wouldn't have to pay her for the difference between a single and a double room for the night I was not there because my flight had been delayed.

After I had flown to Washington, DC, rented a car (my flight to Newark had been diverted), drove to New Jersey to pick up her daughter, flown with Murphy back to Illinois, then drove Murphy up to Wisconsin to stay with her grandma, all at my own expense. After I had rearranged my friend's plans before her wedding, so I could spend time with my dying friend. After I had incurred the extra cost of plane and train tickets between Germany and Italy. Jacki wasn't going to charge me the twenty dollar difference between the room prices because my flight had been delayed. I didn't talk to her for months.

About a week after the "Fritz-past life" phone call, I called Jacki to give her the e-mail address of my brother-in-law and his wife in Germany in case she wanted to stay there during her travels through Europe.

"Thanks a lot! I'll write to them right now. I'm not going to Denmark anymore. I'm going down to Venice instead," she told me.

"So, Fritz called you."

"No, I called him. I wanted to see if he got my book."

Sure you did.

"He was busy when I called, but he told me to hang on a minute. He told me he loved the book."

"So are you going to meet him in Venice?"

"I don't know. He's going to call me closer to the time I'm leaving and try to make plans then."

It was a short conversation. She was at work and had a meeting to go to.

I thought to myself after I hung up with her, he's not going to call. And if you do meet him in Venice, it doesn't matter because this is not going to work out. This past life story he fed you was just a line to get you into bed. But I would never say any of that. And when she calls crying because it's over, I'll console her.

I am a complete enabler in this relationship. There was a time in our relationship when I was more forthright, when I could tell her to cut her losses now and move on. But I spoke to her about twenty times a day back then. I had more chances to rebuild what I tore down. Now I speak to her about an hour a month. My role now is to support, not to coach.

I know she will always be my best friend through the many men, the secrets, even the lies. She knew me before my struggle for authenticity in my relationships. She knew me during the days where we would go on Spring Break and just lie to everyone for a whole week - I was a nuclear engineer, and she was an engineering consultant. I taught her to lie for fun. I showed her how to lie to win. We would go out and hunt men in tandem.

So I will never confront her with her lies. I don't want to be confronted with mine. I never confessed what a big liar I was to Steve; I am too ashamed. But Jacki knows. She knows I've lied, even to her. She is somehow the keeper of my secrets and lies. Even though we never talk about it, I trust her with them. She will never use them against me. She loves me despite them.

So she will always be my friend. I wish her the happiness, love, and especially honesty that I've found in my marriage. I get angry at her sometimes, but I know I have been capable of the same behavior, the same insensitivity, the same lies. So I try not to judge her and just try to be the friend I know she needs. Even though in my silence, I know I continue to lie.

Peek-A-Boo
A Play in One Act

Dee Totz

Cast of characters

Leslie: A 30ish woman. She has a dark quality about her. She is a professional and has not let the things in her life affect her everyday life.

Dr. Pressman: A therapist.

Playwright notes: The stage should contain a leather, high-backed chair and a sofa of some sort. The lighting should be dim as to give the stage a shadow effect. The high-backed chair should be placed so the audience cannot see who is in it. We (the audience) should only hear the therapist. The couch should be the focal point on the stage. The play is written for two women, but any combination of genders can be used. Dr. Pressman is heard from off stage. There is no need for that character to be seen.

Setting: A therapist's office. Leslie is on the couch. She is already on stage. No entrance is needed. Leslie moves about the office throughout her monologue.

Dr. Pressman: So we have been dealing with your feelings about your father for many months now. I feel that today we are ready for you to go a little farther with those feelings.

Leslie: What do you want from me? I want him to know how I feel, not you. It's not the same!

Dr. Pressman: Pretend that I am your father.

Leslie: Like he pretended he was my father

all those years? So, now I will do as he did for all those years?

Dr. Pressman: That is what I get paid to do. You pay me to help you, and I know that this will help. It will give you some finalization in your life.

Leslie: Yes, I want it to help.

Dr. Pressman: Then I want you to pretend. Think that you asked your father to a place that you felt comfortable. Find that place in your mind . . .

Leslie: A park. A park with trees and swings. We never played on swings together. I always wanted to play on swings. He never had time.

Dr. Pressman: Good . . . Now pretend that you can tell him everything that you feel about...

Leslie: I asked you to come here. We never came here when I was little. You were always too busy. Too busy for me, too busy for mom. You look like hell. It has been 15 years since you left us. I was 14 when you left. You couldn't leave without a bang could you? No you would call from pay phones. From bars, in gas station parking lots, drunk with some hooker on your arm giggling and laughing in mom's ear. For some reason she would have let you come back. Even after all of that. You probably don't care do you? They are still making beer, so you don't have any worries, do you? Because everything can be fixed with a beer mug in your hand can't it . . . DAD?

That sounds like a foul word coming from my mouth, pouring from my lips like some poisoned molasses.

Dr. Pressman: Continue . . . you're doing very well . . .

Leslie: When I was a little girl I slept with mom because I was afraid of the dark. And you used to sleep in my bed. I never knew that you had been home. You used to leave pennies on top of the floor model TV. Remember? You would go through your change and pick out the pennies because you said that they made your pocket too heavy. Just like I did. I made your life too heavy, so you picked me out of it. Left me in that house with the floor model TV. I had to hear the most wonderful bedtime stories. That only you could tell in your own way . . . DAD.

After mom had tucked me into bed safety beside her, a noise would wake me from my serene sleep. The clicking and scratching of a clumsy drunk hand trying to place a house key into a door that the intoxicated eyes could not see.

I heard "Fucking door keeps moving!!" and "Bitch didn't change the locks!! I'll break the door in if I have!!' my safety was never in question.

Slowly sliding out of the bed mom would slip out. Carefully trying not to wake me. Creeping through the house she would go to the door and let you in. I was always awake. Mom would then come back to bed and check on me, as if something would have happened to me while she was gone.

Some nights you would vary the story a bit. Some nights after our old drunk king would be let into the castle he would then spill upon his kingdom the wretched vile thing that intoxicated his body. That's right, dad. Remember, you would puke all over the house. Puking. Puking . . . you would add colorful dialogue

"why does everyone hate me?? why can't I win?"

A loving queen who took her vow many years ago standing by to help, Mom always had answers to the questions. "No one hates you." she would say.

But me—the princess lay fast a sleep in her large bed safe from the harm that lay outside the bedroom door. You told my mother while you regurgitated the thing that was to help you through the day. "I love you.". Those were the only kind words that you said to her in your drunken sexy voice with the smell of puke on your breath.

Dr. Pressman: Just take a moment now and lets go to the time when you were in fourth grade. And you had the teacher. Mrs. Ginto ...

Leslie: Dad, remember Mrs. Ginto?? Well, no you wouldn't would you? You never even knew that I was in school till I graduated high school. Well . . . DAD . . . talk about embarrassed. I was in the fourth grade and I was looking up a word in the glossary of my reading book. I stumbled upon the word "depressed" I knew that you were seeing a . . . well, what did mom say? Yes, she said "daddy needs to get better. You want daddy to get better don't you? For daddy to get better he has to go see a therapist now. Don't worry daddy will get better." I was so proud I took the book to my teacher and said "my dad is this and he is going to get better!!." I bragged to my friends "my dad is depressed!!!" I thought that I had something that the other kids didn't. That somehow you were better than their fathers. I thought that you were. You gave me pennies. Their fathers didn't give them pennies.

Dr. Pressman: Now the affair. The one that you most recently found out about.

Leslie: Oh, yes, guess what I know? I know that you had an affair with your business partner. He was also a family friend. Yes, He! I was surprised. Well, isn't that different. I know that the affair went on for years and years.

You lived such a lie. Your whole life was a game. A game of hideand-go-seek with your emotions. If you felt something that you thought that you shouldn't, you hid it with liquor. A pill. Anything that would make you feel nothing. I knew him. We all knew him. Uncle Sam! He was at all of the parties that we had. He traveled with us. He was fun and you trusted him with me. Mom knew all of these years. She tells me that you went to her and told her that you were going to do that, you were going to cheat on her with him. And then you did not only cheat; you paraded him around her.

Why didn't you just take a big sign and put it in the front yard that said "I CHEAT ON MY WIFE WITH A MAN."

I have taken the cover off of my eyes. Peek-a-boo, I see you. That is another game we never played.

Dr. Pressman: Next week at the same time?

The Stage lights go down all we see on the stage is Leslie's lit cigarette in the ashtray.

Wordeater 102 Student Jury:

Jeff Adams
Nicolle Byrnside
Jeff Hicks
Nancy Lockhart
Francine Tolf

Awards

Prose ($5.00)

Miguel Barron
Matt Furlane
Karen Henning
Mike Kalata
Bonnie Kodrick
Sharon Thomas

Poetry ($5.00)

Ann Marie Girard
Chris Helin
Bonnie Kodrick
Milly Laux

Cover Design ($20.00)

Michael Fletcher

John Stobart is solely responsible for the awards.

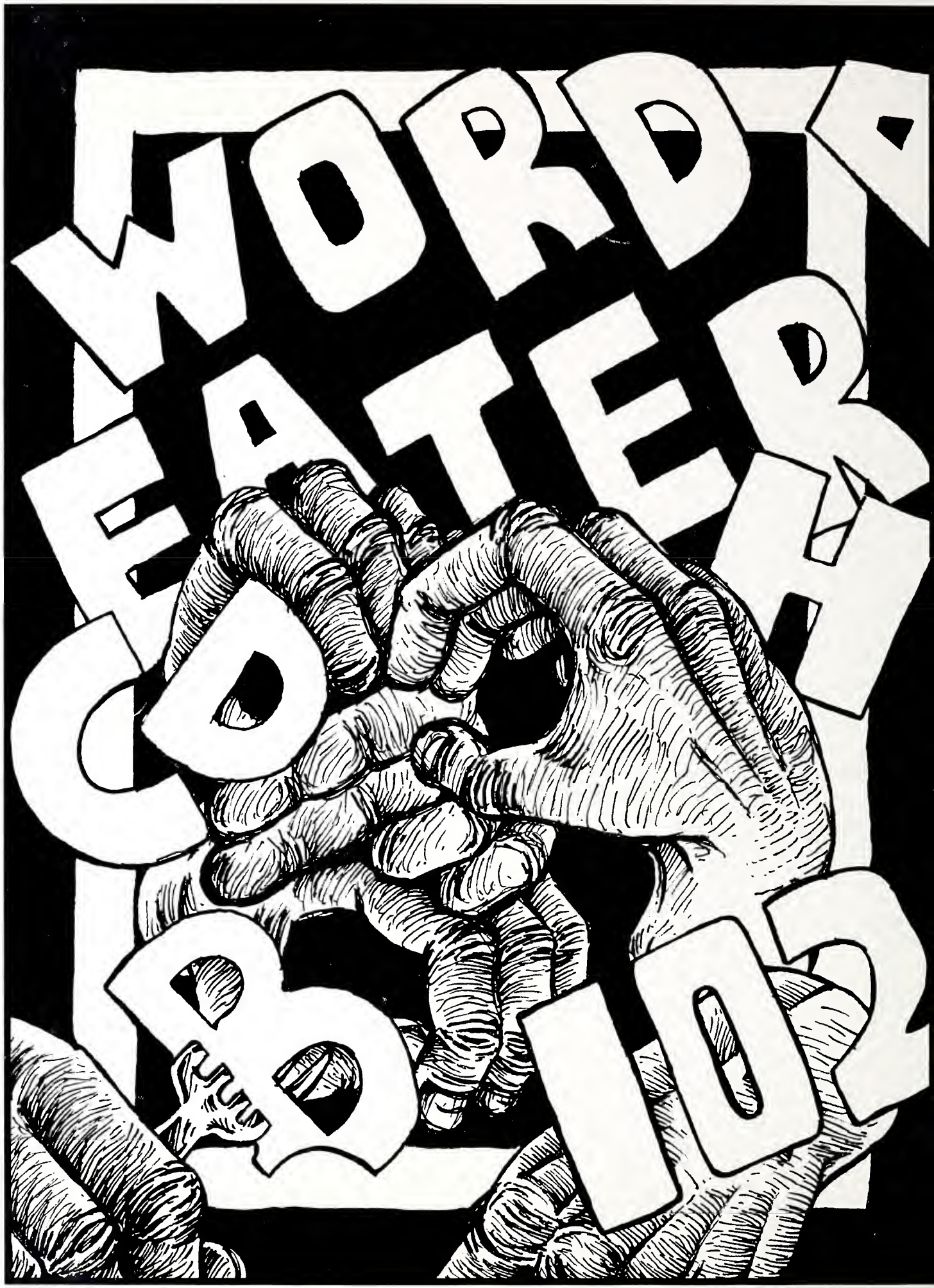
Manuscript and cover designs must be submitted to:
John Stobart, Room C-1069

by

October 12, 1998 - Wordeater 103
November 30, 1998 - Wordeater 104

Cover Designs submitted must be one inch margins all around.
Emphasize lines. Use india ink.

This issue contains selections from students, faculty, alumni and friends of Joliet Junior College. Only current students are eligible for awards. Awards are not made to "anonymous" or pen name writers. Sign each page submitted and include your student identification number.


WORD
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BOX